

## **In Which Hopper is a Dance Mom by the-singular-peep**

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Family, Humor

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-05-30 20:51:50

**Updated:** 2018-05-30 20:51:50

**Packaged:** 2019-12-16 23:20:28

**Rating:** K

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 2,119

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** Hopper loves his little girl, and would do anything for her. And he means /anything/. [IN WHICH EVERYTHING IS OKAY SERIES. COMPLETE. PT 13/?. PT 12: "IN WHICH FLO MEETS ELEVEN."]

## **In Which Hopper is a Dance Mom**

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**May 8, 1985. Wednesday.**

She saw it in a book.

She saw it in a book, gave him those big brown puppy dog eyes, and less than two months later, he's sitting in a ballet studio surrounded by suburban moms, watching his daughter attempt a pirouette.

Hopper doesn't quite know how he got so soft.

Eleven had been begging to read, and Hopper knew it. She hated so much that she couldn't read as well as her friends; she was trying, she really was, but the words just wouldn't come to her. She could read small sentences, and could piece together little words on her own, and was getting better at sounding things out, but more often than not she would grow frustrated and "hmmph" before throwing the book with her mind and crossing her arms.

That kid had a temper on her.

When Hopper had asked her why she threw it, she simply huffed again, not making eye contact.

"Can't. Too big."

Hopper looked at the book she threw, then back to her.

"Kid, there's only 60 or so pages. How small do you need it?" He asked, meaning to lighten the mood but also because he was confused.

"*Words*," Eleven reiterated, rolling her eyes like it was the most obvious thing in the world. Hopper thought he felt his heart go kaput for a few seconds as he saw how *teenagery* she looked, but then it resumed again when he assessed the situation properly.

The words were too big.

His girl needed *picture books*.

And that was *freaking adorable*.

He smiled, and ruffled her hair, and even that tiny action earned a small smile.

"I'll get you some books next time I go out, yeah? Some books with easier words."

After work that Wednesday, Hopper had stopped by the Wheelers. He hadn't known where else to go, not knowing any other small children or people who would know how to teach reading. So he knocked twice on the door, and within ten seconds, the Wheeler boy was standing in front of him, out of breath and looking out expectantly. His face curled up in disapproval when he saw El wasn't behind the tall policeman.

"Just me kid. I need to speak to your mom."

Mike scowled again.

"Why?"

Hopper rolled his eyes.

"I just do, okay? Grab 'er for me, will ya?"

Mike sighed, sadly, and let Hopper into the house before going to fetch his mother. Hopper had to admit, that boy was absolutely smitten with his daughter, and it actually *was* kind of cute. As long as he didn't try anything.

Ever.

Within minutes, Karen was in front of him, and Baby Holly was in her arms.

"What can I help you with, Jim?" Karen said, her face confused. Holly grinned at him.

"Hi-hi!" She shouted, giving him a lopsided wave with one hand. He

smiled a tiny, pained smile back and waved a sad excuse for a wave, and she hid her face in her mother's collar.

"Hey, Karen, uhm.. Has Michael told you about Eleven's.. situation?" He tried. He knew Karen knew about El, and where she had been before coming to his home and her own. He knew Karen knew she was abused, and that she had to be kept secret for the next year, but he didn't know how much else she was aware of.

"I know.. everything, I think. Why, Jim, is there something I should be aware of?"

Hopper sighed, his hands in his pockets.

"No, ma'am," He said, turning on his police-officer charm, "It's just.. She never got to learn much back in that place. I've been teachin' her a bit, at home, like math and stuff, but she's really struggling with the whole reading thing. I only have books I used to read at the house, and.. She's not doing too great with them. Even if she's not bored to tears, she can't make out the words more than half the time..." He let his voice trail off before he realized he was looking at his feet. He didn't like asking for help. Especially not from a white, suburban mom with three rebellious kids and a lazy sack of potatoes for a husband. He looked up quickly. To his surprise, Karen was smiling.

"Would she like to borrow some of Holly's? She has picture books, and a few chapter books we read together. I think a little girl would like those a lot better than, what, old mechanic manuals and fishing books?"

Hopper did not inform her that she was correct. Or that the only other genre he owned was cheesy romance novels.

Karen disappeared for approximately thirty seconds, returning with a large armful of thin books. Among the bunch was a book titled "Beezus and Ramona," another titled "Charlotte's Web," and a few with the label, "The Boxcar Children." On top, and most prevalent however, was a thin, pale pink book adorned with a drawing of a little white mouse asleep in her bed, images of ballerinas floating above her. Hopper chuckled.

"Yep. These look more her style. Thanks, Karen."

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Once back home, Hopper walked in the door to find an empty house. He was confused, and a little bit angry - Eleven was supposed to stay *right here* unless Hopper was there to take her out. The year wasn't up yet, though it was close, and he wasn't going to take any risks. Before he could get angry, though, he took a deep breath and started in the door, thinking rationally. Eleven could not have opened the door for him if she wasn't at home. She just wasn't where she normally was.

He walked in, set the books on the coffee table, and started to call her name.

"Hey, Ellie? I got a surprise for you," He said, but got no response. He shut the door and wandered around a little. "Eleven, come on out."

Still, nothing.

"Jane, come here, please."

Nope.

She really had to start following the rules.

Hopper hung his hat on the rack and sighed before beginning to walk around the small house.

She wasn't in the kitchen, nor the adjacent living room, nor her bedroom. He halfway expected her to be in his bedroom - she usually hid there if she had something to hide. Like that one time with the ants.

So many ants.

Hopper brushed it off, wriggling a little at the thought of those tiny insects. He looked, but she wasn't in his room. He stood there, perplexed, before he heard a tiny oof and turned towards it. He walked four feet and turned right, now looking straight into the laundry room.

And there she was, her little legs and bottom straight up in the air

and her head and arms down *inside* the washing machine. Hopper couldn't help himself. He laughed, and Eleven jumped, causing her to become top heavy and fall past the point of no return into the washing machine.

Hopper, the massive man he was, had never had this problem. He taught Eleven how to do laundry two weeks ago and didn't even think about the fact that she was not quite tall enough to reach the clothes at the bottom.

She wasn't quite *short*, per say. Not excessively. She was little, yes, but she was probably just a little below average - shorter than most of her friends, but a tad taller than Max. The thing was, she was done. Hopper expected her to grow rapidly under his care, now with the right nutrients and regular (well, occasional) physical exercise, but she hadn't. She hadn't grown at *all*. After her first doctor's visit with Doctor Owens, Hopper knew why. More likely than not, all those years without any sunlight, exercise, or real care, her growth had been stunted. A lot.

And that meant, probably forever, his daughter would be stuck Washing-Machine-Diving.

"Hey there, Janie," Hopper laughed, reaching to grab Eleven's sides. He pulled her out of the washer and laughed at how her mop of hair was hanging over her eyes and sticking out in every direction. She was still in her pajamas, the little blue star ones, but that wasn't a surprise. She barely ever got dressed, because what was the point? She wouldn't be leaving. But then again, she had been getting dressed more recently. With going to the Wheelers' on Tuesday and Thursdays, going on walks on Wednesdays, seeing her friends on Saturdays and having Mike over on Fridays, she was dressed most days, actually. Hopper gaped.

"Jane El Hopper, did you just now wake up?"

Eleven shrugged. Hopper facepalmed. Even at thirteen years old, she was already turning into a little teenager. She paused, and realized what day it was.

"Walk?" She asked. Hopper sighed.

"Okay. Whatever. That's fine. Actually, I picked something up for you, you wanna see?"

Eleven nodded excitedly.

"Alright, c'mon, kiddo. C'mon," He ushered her into the living room where the books were.

Eleven absolutely loved the books. She adored every moment of them, and Hopper was so glad to see Eleven reading more and more around the house, even going as far as to read *Beezus and Ramona* at the kitchen table at breakfast. And waking Hopper up at one AM to ask what *this one last word* meant. And falling asleep with it on her face in the middle of the floor. And having to get him to help every free moment he was home, because she still wasn't the best at longer words, or reading chapters.

But by far, Eleven's favorite had to be that pink book with the mouse on the cover.

*Angelina Ballerina* became a household name, and tutus became an everyday wish. It was everywhere in his house - drawings, art projects, make-shift costumes - and Hopper was about *this close* to losing his mind.

And then it happened.

It was three fifteen one Wednesday afternoon on their walk, and Eleven had a burning question.

"Ballet." Eleven said, stepping carefully over a puddle even though she was wearing her rain boots. Hopper startled.

"What do you mean, sweet girl?" He asked, looking down at her. She scrunched up her face, and Hopper knew she was thinking hard about how to word her next thought.

"Ballet. Want to.. do that. Want to do ballet." Eleven paused, in both her words and her steps, and looked up to Hopper. "Please, Hop? Please?"

Hopper would like to say that he said no. He would like to say that

he didn't give in every single time Eleven looked at him with those big brown doe eyes. He would *like* to say that, but that would be a complete lie. And friends don't lie.

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It was one month later, in the heat of June, and his thirteen year old daughter was all decked out in the finest tutu and leotard he could afford, and she was attending her very first ballet lesson. Actual classes began in late July, but today was the test day - a short introduction, very few children attending, a discussion of payment plans and different schedule choices.

And Hopper was seated in the room on the benches, surrounded by seventeen suburban moms all oooing and awing over their little girls being graceful little fairies.

His little girl was currently trying to catch a spider that she had found in the corner, but whatever. It had only cost fifty dollars straight up to get her into these classes. And twenty for the leotard. And ten for the tutu. And five for the tights. And fifteen for the slippers.

Hopper sighed.

"Which one is yours?" A woman with obviously dyed blonde hair asked him, leaning over with a warm smile. Hopper sighed.

"She's the little one with her head in the cubbies. Jane Hopper."

The woman smiled.

"Oh, I can see the resemblance."

Hopper didn't know whether to smile or frown, because one, thinking of Eleven taking after him even after not being actually related made him feel unconditionally proud, but, two, all the lady could see was little Jane Hopper's rear end as she made an utter fool of herself trying to do something completely insane in public.

Hopper almost laughed. That was exactly what he was known for. Instead he nodded and looked lovingly at his child.



"Yes ma'am, she takes after my side."